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ABSTRACT

The paper considers the efficacy of role reversal, used in conflict situations, for reducing distortions in perceptions of the opponent's position, for increasing understanding of the opponent's position, for clarifying communication during negotiations, and for inducing cooperative behavior in conflict situations. It was noted that little research has concerned the variables which mediate its effectiveness. Three such variables were manipulated in this experiment: (1) warmth of interaction; (2) accuracy of understanding; and (3) the proposal of compromises. A two phase intergroup competition procedure was used with 128 volunteers from a small liberal arts college. Results supported the hypotheses: (1) that accuracy of understanding of the opponent's position was related to the number of agreements reached in negotiations; (2) that warmth of interaction facilitates negotiations, but not opponent's attitude change; and (3) that proposing compromises leads more readily tc agreements than not proposing them. (TL)

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The Efficacy of Role Reversal: Warmth of Interaction, Accuracy of Understanding and the Proposal of Compromises

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Given the tendencies in conflict situations for perceptions of the opponent's position and motivation to be distorted (e.g., Brofenbrenner, 1962) and for communication to be cut off or misunderstood (e.g., Deutsch & Krauss, 1962), there is a need for procedures which reduce distortions in perception and ensure effective communication in conflict situations. A procedure which has had some success in various applied settings is role reversal. Role reversal is a procedure in which one or both of two persons in a discussion present the viewpoint of the other. It is "taking the role of the other" in a specific situation in which the other person is present. That is, given that A and b are in a discussion, A presents B's point of view and/or B presents A's point of view.

Although there is growing experimental evidence of the efficacy of role reversal for reducing distortions in perceptions of the opponent's position, for increasing understanding of the opponent's position, for clarifying communication during negotations, and for inducing cooperative behavior in conflict situations (Johnson, 1966, 1967, 1969; Johnson & Dustin, in press; Muney & Deutsch, 1968), little has been said about the variables which mediate its effectiveness. At the very least, role reversal demonstrates the accuracy with which one understands the opponent's position and feelings and communicates an-affective tone concerning how one feels about the opponent and his position. This

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experiment studies two variables which are hypothesized to mediate the effectiveness of role reversal: accuracy of understanding of the opponent's position and the warmth expressed towards the opponent as a person. The role reversal theorists (Cohen, 1950, 1951; Rogers, 1952, 1965; Rapoport, 1960; Deutsch, 1962; Johnson, 1966) have hypothesized that the conviction that one has been heard and clearly understood by one's opponent will lead to (1) a reduction of defensive adherence to one's position and (2) a reduction of feelings of being threatened by the opponent's position, thus making one more susceptible to cooperative solutions to the conflict. It is hypothesized, therefore, that accuracy of role reversal will result in the conviction that one has been clearly heard and understood, thus reducing one's defensive adherence to one's point of view and one's feelings of being threatened, and thereby resulting in a willingness to reach an agreement in negotiations.

There has been almost no research on the consequences of different affective tones communicated in conflict situations. On the basis of the research conducted by Traux and Charkhuff (1967) on therapy dyads and the research by Johnson (1966) on negotiations, it may be stated that the expression of warmth is positively correlated with high emotional involvement and intimacy in a relationship between two individuals and with favorable interpersonal attitudes. It is hypothesized that expressing warmth towards the opponent will result in more favorable attitudes toward the actor than will expressing coldness.

On the basis of his findings, Johnson (1966) concluded that role reversal may be more effective when used in combination with demonstration of one's willingness to compromise and with attempts to lessen the opponent's

competitive ties with his group. Proposing compromises is a way of demonstrating one's willingness to compromise and if reciprocated by a counter-compromise it may unfreeze the opponent from his original position. Assuming that proposing a compromise signals a cooperative intent and thereby increases the cooperative forces in a situation, it is hypothesized that more agreements will be made when compromises are proposed than when they are not.

Method

There are three variables manipulated in this experiment: warmth of interaction, accuracy of understanding, and the proposal of compromises. Confederates were trained to express either warmth or coldness towards the subject in their non-verbal behavior and through their tone of voice. Accuracy of understanding was operationally defined as the degree of accuracy with which the confederates reflected back the content of the subject's position and feelings during negotiations; the confederates were trained to be either accurate or inaccurate. Finally, in half of the conditions the confederates proposed a series of compromises and in the other half of the conditions they did not propose any compromises. Two independent judges listened to tape recordings of the negotiating sessions and correctly identified the appropriate condition in all but one of the cases, thus verifying the effectiveness of the manipulations.

An intergroup competition procedure consisting of two phases was utilized. The fist phase consisted of the induction of the orientation to the negotiations and the building of commitment to the group's position. The second consisted of the negotiations between the subject and a

representative from the other group (in actual fact a confederate of the experimenter). In the first phase, which lasted for 15 minutes, the subjects were placed in a group of four individuals consisting of two subjects and two confederates. They were led to believe that they were competing against a similar group of four meeting in a different room. Each group was given a description of a hypothetical court case dealing with a civil law suit which included the evidence supporting their position. The confederates ensured that the subjects fully understood the instructions, knew their group's position, were committed to it, and understood the individualistic orientation they were instructed to have towards the negotiations. The results of a questionnaire given at the end of Phase One verified the effectiveness of the induction procedures. In the Second Phase both the confederate and the subject were given five minutes each to present their group's position, the confederate was given five minutes to role reverse, and the pair was given 15 minutes to negotiate. This procedure has been used successfully in several previous experiments.

Four confederates were used in the experiment, two male and two female. Subjects were randomly assigned to conditions, given the limitation that an equal number of males and females appeared in each condition. Confederates were randomly assigned to conditions, given the limitations that each confederate negotiated with four subjects (two males and two females) in each condition. In this way the number of male-male, female-female, and male-female netotiating pairs were balanced in each condition. During Phase One the confederate did not know in which condition he would be negotiating. The confederates were selected for their ability to

communicate warmth or coldness and accuracy or inaccuracy of understanding. They were then given extensive training, which included piloting 32 subjects, before the experiment began.

The subjects were volunteers from a small liberal arts college in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Students participating ranged from freshmen to seniors and were majoring in a wide variety of subjects. Both males and females were used. One-hundred-twenty-eight subjects participated in the experiment, eight males and eight females in each of the eight conditions.

Results and Discussion

In order to conserve space the means for each dependent variable are not presented; only the F-ratios and the "p" values are given. For each dependent variable the degrees of freedom are one and one-hundred-twenty. Compared with inaccurate understanding, accurate understanding of the subject's position resulted in a feeling on the part of the subjects that their opponent understood their position ($F = 45.45$; $p < .01$), was attempting to understand their position ($F = 21.84$; $p < .01$), and was an understanding person ($F = 5.24$; $p < .05$). Accuracy of understanding was also related to the number of agreements reached in negotiations ($F = 5.00$; $p < .05$). Thus the first hypothesis of the study was accepted.

There is overwhelming evidence that warmth of interaction is related to positive attitudes toward the actor. Compared to coldness, the warmth one displays towards his opponent is significantly related to being liked ($F = 88.78$; $p < .01$), to being trusted ($F = 44.24$; $p < .01$), to being perceived as similar as a person ($F = 23.71$; $p < .01$) and as similar in beliefs and values ($F = 25.28$; $p < .01$), to being perceived as accepting

of the subject ($F = 90.40$; $p < .01$) and of the subject's position ($F = 29.65$; $p < .01$), and to being perceived as an understanding person ($F = 112.55$; $p < .01$). The interpersonal attraction, perceptions of similarity, and positive attitudes toward the opponent resulting from the warmth of interaction do not, however, influence the negotiator to reach an agreement. It seems that two negotiators may like each other very much, see themselves as being very similar, see each other as accepting and understanding individuals, yet still be bound to their group's position and be unwilling to reach an agreement.

There is evidence that when one expresses warmth towards the opponent he reinforces the opponent's feelings that his position is superior. Subjects in the warm conditions felt that their position was superior to the position of the opponent more frequently than did subjects in the cold conditions ($F = 4.97$; $p < .05$). Thus under the conditions of this experiment it seems that if one wishes to create positive interpersonal attitudes in negotiations he should express warmth towards the opponent, but if one wishes to change the opponent's attitudes on the issue being negotiated he should express coldness towards the opponent.

The third hypothesis of the study was that more agreements will be made when compromises are proposed than when they are not. The results of the study clearly support this hypothesis; if one wishes to reach an agreement, one is much better off proposing compromises than not proposing compromises. Compared with not proposing compromises, the proposal of compromises increases the perceived trustworthiness of the proposer ($F = 4.75$; $p < .05$) and the perceived cooperativeness of the situation

($F = 5.57$; $p < .05$). More agreements are made ($F = 11.24$; $p < .01$) in less time ($F = 14.00$; $p < .01$) when compromises are proposed than when they are not. To propose a compromise, however, is to publicly state that one is weakening in one's adherence to his position; future research should clarify the conditions under which this will be exploited by encouraging the opponent to stay firm in his position and the conditions under which it will be reciprocated by the opponent.

One interesting finding is that the subjects in the conditions in which compromises were proposed felt that their position was superior to their opponent's position significantly more than did the subjects in the no-compromises-proposed conditions ($F = 14.84$; $p < .01$). Thus it seems that if one wishes to influence the opponent's attitudes, he is better off not proposing compromises; if one is interested in reaching an agreement, he is better off proposing compromises. The cost of increasing the probability of reaching an agreement by proposing compromises seems to be reinforcing the opponent's belief that his position is superior to one's own.

In addition to the analysis discussed above, a 2x2 analysis of variance was conducted on the data, crossing sex of confederate with sex of subject ($N = 128$; 32 in each condition). The results strongly support the conclusion that in the type of negotiation situation used and on the dependent variables studied, it makes little difference whether the subjects negotiate with a member of the same or opposite sex.

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Footnote

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